

**The English Reformation  
and the Invention of Innovation**

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The King is to swear to “maintain the true religion of Jesus Christ, the preaching of his holy word, and due and right ministrations of the sacraments now received and preached within this realm, and shall abolish and gain-stand all false religion contrary to the same; without swearing to any innovation of policie discipline of the kirk”. Such is a King’s oath of coronation, as James Hamilton, Scottish Commissioner, put it in 1638 (Hamilton, 1639: 12). Now compare this statement to that of David Lindsay, Bishop of Brechin: It is “the Prince his Priviledge...to call in question Customes and Statutes...His Majestie might lawfully crave an innouation of any Church Rite” (Lindsay, 1621: 64).

We have here two contradictory statements on innovation, from two persons in authority: a nobleman and privy councillor, and a bishop. Two statements coming from persons from the same nation and culture: Scotland. How do we explain the difference of opinion? On one hand, perhaps the acceptance of innovation depends on “Ages, Times, People and Nations”, or circumstances, to use Lindsay’s typology about “things indifferent”. If so, the beginning of a reign is one thing, its continuance another. A King may do whatever he wants, in spite of promises (oaths). On the other hand, perhaps the attitude toward innovation depends on the type of innovation. If the innovation is considered minor or “indifferent” (e.g.: external ceremonies), it is accepted; if it is major or “substantial” (not conforming to scripture, law or custom), it is not. Finally, the acceptance of innovation may depend on who innovates.

This article looks at the use of the concept of innovation in the official or state language of the Reformation in England. To be sure, “At no stage was the English Reformation an isolated act of state” (Dickens, 1982: 382). However, at the moment when the Reformation became a national project, it required instruments of enforcement. Royal proclamations were such a tool, provided they were supported by administrative and judicial procedures. This was rarely the case. Rudolph Heinze talks of Royal Proclamations as “propaganda devices” (Heinze, 1976). This statement needs to be revised. A Proclamation is a message. It provides a language that travels. It is distributed through the Church and Court hierarchy, read in the parishes and posted in public spaces. No one could ignore the message.

Language played a central role in the politics of the Reformation, and the concept of innovation was part of that language. The concept was used to enforce and secure the Reformation, but not in the sense that the Reformation was an innovation. At the time, the Reformation was not talked of in these terms. A reformation renovates. It does not innovate. As a new orthodoxy in the making, the Reformers and the conformists tolerated no innovation. To contemporaries, innovation was deviance, as heresy is (Godin, 2015).

Many concepts in the vocabulary of the Reformation have been studied: reformation (Ladner, 1959), Protestantism (Marshall, 2012), Puritanism (Beek, 1969; Collinson, 1980), popery (e.g.: Clancy, 1976) and Catholicism (Marshall, 2005). Yet innovation, as part of the vocabulary, has not been analyzed. As the Reformation progresses, the concept of innovation entered the vocabulary pervasively. The concept served both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, conformists and non-conformists. On one side, the concept served admonitions toward conformity. On the other side, it served allegations of non-conformity. The concept never served an innovator in supporting his case, as we might expect from a modern point of view. Innovation was a charge brought against someone who changes the order of things. Charges of innovation shared place in the vocabulary with charges of popery and Puritanism, often employed as a synonym. This article suggests that the concept of innovation had two purposes during the

English Reformation. First, it was an injunction (not to innovate). Second, it was an accusation (of non-conformity).

The article looks at Royal Proclamations and Declarations, but also Acts and Statutes of Parliament, and Kings' messages, speeches and letters, in order to unearth what the concept means, what use is made of the concept, and what ends it serves. It also examines remonstrances, petitions and protestations in Parliament, to study the reception of the language acts of Tudor and Stuart monarchs. The documents studied come from the material collected in a diverse anthology of constitutional documents. However, no anthology is complete. First, to varying degrees, every anthology covers documents selectively; second, most of the texts collected are incomplete (i.e.: extracts), with a few exceptions such as John Rushworth and James Larkin.<sup>1</sup> I thus complemented this material with official documents reproduced in diverse histories<sup>2</sup> and searches in *Early English Books Online*, *British History Online* and *State Papers Online* were also consulted.

The article is not a history of the Reformation. It rather studies key moments when innovation served religious policy. The period covered is 1548-1649, namely from the first Proclamation on innovation issued by Edward VI to the end of Charles I's reign, a reign in which the concept of innovation entered into the everyday vocabulary, and when the "humour" or "spirit" of innovation, two keys terms of the time, could not be ignored and were challenged.

## 1. The Language of the Reformation

The English Reformers sought to maintain the authority of the Scriptures, or the true Church, against human inventions or superstitious additions to it. "Far from posing as radicals", claims Arthur Dickens, the Reformers "tried to demonstrate that it was the papal Church itself which over the centuries had produced the innovators, and that the purpose of their own present Reformation was no more than a restoration of the Christianity which Christ has taught" (Dickens, 1989: 22).

Henry VIII seized upon the anticlerical arguments of his time and institutionalized a reformation of the Christian Church. He severed England from Roman jurisdiction and curtailed the wealth and privileges of the English church. To get his divorce from Catherine of Aragon approved, he broke with Rome and made himself the Sovereign of the Church. With the Act of Supremacy of 1534, Henry became the "only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England" with "full power and authority to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities" of the Papacy for the "conservation of the peace, unity and tranquility of this realm".<sup>3</sup>

Doctrinal issues did not motivate Henry's Reformation in the first place. Only in a second step did Henry, or rather his ministers, address these issues. As Charles V's ambassador Eustace Chapuys put it: "there had been no innovation in religion except what concerned the Pope's

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<sup>1</sup> Rushworth, 1721; Gardiner, 1906; Gee and Hardy, 1914; Elton, 1960; Tanner, 1961; Hughes and Larkin, 1964; Dickens and Carr, 1967; Larkin, 1983; Kenyon, 1986; Cressy and Ferrell, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Balcanquhall (1639), Parliament (1641b; 1654), Burnet (1677), Frankland (1681) and Charles I (1687).

<sup>3</sup> Elton, 1960: 364-65.

authority”.<sup>4</sup> Henry’s Reformation remains “Catholic”, so claimed the regime and the conservatives (Marshall, 2005). In the Ten Articles of 1536, Henry reaffirmed disputed traditional Catholic beliefs and practices like transubstantiation and clerical celibacy, and legislated against “heretics”, explicitly including Luther and the Lollards by name, as well as Anabaptists.<sup>5</sup>

Two Injunctions followed to ensure the doctrine of the Ten Articles (1536 and 1538).<sup>6</sup> Henry’s reformation culminated in the *Act abolishing diversity of opinions* of 1539, known as The Act of the Six Articles, the first Act designed to enforce uniformity in religion, or “conservation” of “a true sincere and uniform doctrine”, for “concord, agreement and unity of opinions”, against “the manifold perils, dangers and inconveniences which have heretofore in many places and regions grown, sprung and arisen of the diversities of minds and opinions”. The Act institutes commissions, visitations and synods to enquire into the “variable and sundry opinions and judgments, [and the] great discord and variance” in the Kingdom. It orders severe punishments for minor offenses. Dissenting persons “shall be “deemed and adjudged heretics”, and shall suffer “pains of death”.<sup>7</sup>

The vocabulary of the Reformation is settled there. The Acts and Declarations of the Tudors and the early Stuarts abound with a vocabulary of “uniformity of rite and order”, “obedience and loyalty”, “dissent and discord”. We can make sense of the vocabulary of the early decades of the Reformation with three concepts: uniformity, conformity and authority. But first, what is reformation? To contemporaries, a reformation is not a “novelty” (or “novation”, to use Scots’ term), far less an “innovation”. It does not “change” or “alter” things to something completely new. A Reformation renovates and regenerates: it “restores”, “corrects”, “amends” and “redresses”, as Henry VIII’s and Elizabeth’s Acts of Supremacy put it. A reformation is a return (to the pure doctrine and discipline of ancient or Primitive Church), a renewing of what has been corrupted over time.

The English Reformation is the setting for “uniformity” of doctrine and discipline, in the name of “truth”. The Reformation is a “true religion”, a “pure doctrine” based on the Scriptures, a return to the “primitive Church”. Uniformity is positioned against “diversity” and “variety” of opinions, the “multitude” of ceremonies. It is contrasted to “error”, “superstition”, “abuse”, “excess”, “enormity”, “invention” and “heresy”.

Uniformity is enforced through a vocabulary of “conformity”. “Order”, “obedience” (a key word to Elizabeth), “submission” (Henry VIII, Elizabeth) and “subscription” define conformity. Conformity is opposed to a vocabulary of dissent: “departing”, “transgressing” (Edward’s preface to the Book of Common Prayer), “violating”, “derogating” (Edward), “changing”, “altering” (Elizabeth’s Act of Uniformity and Injunctions). A whole vocabulary made of derogatory terms like “contrary to” is omnipresent in the language of Reformation.

A political vocabulary is combined with this religious and ecclesiastical vocabulary. As Richard Greaves put it, “Primarily because of the Reformation, political obedience became an increasingly significant issue in Tudor England” (Greaves: 1982: 23). In fact, the King being

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<sup>4</sup> *State Papers Online*, Chapuys to Charles V, 9 January 1539.

<sup>5</sup> Bray, 2004: 163-74.

<sup>6</sup> Dickens and Carr, 1967: 85.

<sup>7</sup> Elton, 1960: 399-401.

Head of the Church, religion necessarily serves politics. The political vocabulary is made up of two main concepts. One is “supremacy”. Supremacy is power and authority over the English clergy, but also against Rome. The “power and authority” in religious matters no longer lies in the Church of Rome but in the King. Anyone acting contrary to this authority is an “offender”, “disloyal” and a “traitor”. High treason is the offence most dangerous to a monarch. Another political concept is “unity” (of the realm), the political counterpart to religious uniformity – although unity is also used synonymously with uniformity in religious matters, as in unity of opinions (Henry VIII’s Ten Articles). Uniformity of doctrine serves “concord”, “tranquility” and “peace” in the Commonwealth. It prevents “sedition”, “rebellion”, “subversion” and “conspiracy”.

## 2. Innovation

As a contested concept, innovation is witness to the unreformed Reformation, or a reformation in progress. The concept served monarchs, archbishops and bishops in establishing the Reformation as they thought fit, and served against the calls for further reform. The concept reached Parliament (and the public) with Charles. It is in this context that the concept acquired its meaning for centuries to come.

During Henry’s reign, innovation is not part of the vocabulary of the Reformation, not yet. To be sure, “innovation” is an act Henry was often accused of (his divorce), both from inside (Privy Council) and outside of the country (foreign ambassadors). Henry also used the word in his correspondence to councilors and messengers and ambassadors, as an instruction not to innovate. However, to the best of my knowledge Henry never used the word innovation in his legislation concerning the Reformation. It was left to his successor to give the concept a social life or career.

### 2.1 An Injunction

As mentioned above, Henry’s reformation was not a doctrinal reformation. This is the task to which Edward VI devoted himself. The concept of innovation served his purpose. Ruling mostly by proclamations, Edward established Protestantism in England with various reforms, guided by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. Early in his reign Edward defended himself, claiming he was not innovating. In 1547, Edward’s Regency Council, in the person of Somerset,<sup>8</sup> complained of false news and dangerous tales “invented” by “uncertain authors” in “Markettes, Faires, and Alehouses” of “innovations and changes in religion and ceremonies in the Church” by the King but, so claims Somerset, “never began nor attempted”. Such tales leads to “disquietness and disturbance” of the realm. Anyone who disperses such false tales will suffer the gaol, until he declares who the author is (England. Sovereign. Edward VI, 1547).

Then in 1548, Edward issued *A Proclamation Against Those that Do Innouate*, the first royal injunction ever against innovation. The proclamation placed innovation in context,

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<sup>8</sup> Edward’s reign was ruled by a Regency Council (under his uncle Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, then John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland) because Edward never reached his majority.

constituted an admonition not to innovate and imposed punishments on offenders (England. Sovereign. Edward VI, 1548):

Considering nothing so muche, to tend to the disquieting of his realme, as diversitie of opinions, and varietie of Rites and Ceremonies, concerning Religion and worshippynge of almightie God ...; [considering] certain private Curates, Preachers, and other laye men, contrary to their bounden duties of obedience, both rashely attempte of their owne and singulet witte and mynde, in some Parishe Churches not onely to persuade the people, from the olde and customed Rites and Ceremonies, but also bryngeth in newe and strange orders...according to their fantasies...is an evident token of pride and arrogance, so it tendeth bothe to confusion and disorder...: Wherefore his Majestie straightly chargeth and commandeth, that no maner persone, of what estate, order, or degree soever he be, of his private mynde, will or phantasie, do omitte, leave doune, change, alter or innovate any order, Rite or Ceremonie, commonly used and frequented in the Church of Englande ... Whosoever shall offende, contrary to this Proclamation, shall incure his highness indignation, and suffer imprisonment, and other grievous punishmentes.

The following year (1549), Edward issued an Act of Uniformity. “The king’ Majesty...hath heretofore divers time essayed to stay innovations or new rites...yet the same hath not had such good success as his Highness required”. The Act established “uniform rite and order” in prayer and ceremonies (by way of a Book of Common Prayer as the only legal form of worship), and punishments for “offenders” (both ministers and ordinary people) (Church of England, 1549). The preface to the Book of Common Prayer, written by Thomas Cranmer, deplored that the whole Bible was not read once every year in the church service because the order of the ancient Fathers “hath been so altered, broken and neglected by planting in uncertain stories and legends, with multitude of responds, verses, vain repetitions, commemorations and synodals”. “Here is set forth”, Cranmer wrote, an order “cut off of anthems, responds, invitatories and such like things as did break the continual course of the reading of the Scripture”. The first section of the Book, on ceremonies, explains why some ceremonies are abolished and some retained. The text starts with a contextual dichotomy. “In this our time, the minds of men are so divers, that some thinke it is a great matter of conscience, to depart fro a piece of least of their ceremonies [They are “addicted to their old customs”]...On the other hand, some are “so new-fangled that they would innovate all things and so despise the old”. Yet “No man ought to take in hand, nor presume or alter any publike or common order in Christs Church, except he be lawfully called and authorized thereunto....Although the keeping or omitting of a ceremony, in itself considered, is but a small thing [adiaphora], yet the willful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bray, 2004: 272-76.

In consequence, the Book does away with some ceremonies because of “the great excesse and multitude of them” that lead to abuses. Other ceremonies are retained not for “innovation and new fangleness”, which “is alwayes to bee eschewed”, but for “edification” or “decent order” in the Church. “Without some Ceremonies it is not possible to keepe any order or quiet discipline”. Yet, the text concludes, ceremonies may be “altered and changed”, as laws are. “Every Countrey should use such Ceremonies, as they shall thinke best”. This is one of the first uses of the *adiaphora* argument in a public statement or official document.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2 Obstinate People

In the face of “obstinate” persons (“obstinate”, a term used in Edward’s Act of Uniformity of 1549, Elizabeth’s Injunctions of 1559 and James’ Proclamation of July 1604), monarchs fight throughout their whole reign against innovators. Every monarch starts his/her reign with admonitions not to innovate. As Edward did, such was the case with Elizabeth, a Queen “who always hated Innovation (which for the most part changeth for the worse”) (Baker, 1643: 115). “Her Publick Admonition in almost every Session of Parliament”, so wrote Francis Bacon, natural philosopher, statesman and author of an *Essay of Innovation*, about Queen Elizabeth’s admonition not to innovate in matters of religion: “that no Innovation should be made in the *Discipline and Ceremonies of the Church*”. “Her usuall Custom was, in the beginning of every *Parliament*, to forewarn the *Houses*, not to question, or innovate, any thing, already established, in the *Discipline, or Rites of the Church*” (Bacon, 1608).

Yet Elizabeth’s Proclamations and Declarations very rarely use the word innovation – although Elizabeth’s correspondence and that of her councilors make regular use of it as an instruction not to innovate, like Henry did. In place of innovation, Elizabeth’s keywords are “offence” and “recusancy”, together with a vocabulary made of political terms: “sedition”, “rebellion” and “treason”. Politics is essential to understand Elizabeth’s language of the Reformation. As Geoffrey Elton put it on Elizabeth’s hunt to the Catholics: “The queen did not want to save souls or make converts; she wanted to protect the safety of the realm” (Elton, 1982: p. 423). If the word had not had the pejorative connotation it did at the time, Elizabeth could perhaps have used it to qualify her innovative Acts. But no-one did use the concept in the positive at the time. One positive meaning of innovation is “renewing”. But in this sense, Elizabeth prefers to use “restore” and “revive” (e.g.: Act of Uniformity of 1559; Thirty-nine Articles of 1571). Elizabeth is not innovating, but reviving Henry’s statutes.

We have to turn to Elizabeth’s successor, James, for the use of the concept in monarchs’ documents. In the last decade of Elizabeth’s reign the Puritan movement lost strength, but it came back under James. In the spirit of Elizabeth’s Acts against the Jesuits (1585) and against popish recusants (1593), James issued Declarations and Proclamations against the same in the early years of his reign, using the concept of innovation to support his claims (1604, 1605).

Like Edward and Elizabeth, in the very first year of his reign James proclaimed his intention not to innovate. In April 1604, James sent a message to the Commons, via Francis Bacon, to the effect that His Majesty does not intend to “alter or innovate the fundamental Laws,

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<sup>10</sup> The argument goes back to Augustine, in his Epistle 54. What Scriptures prescribe must be observed. What is not prescribed is “indifferent” and must be left to custom to decide.

Privileges, and good Customs of this Kingdom” (Burgess, 2006: 202). The decisive moment here is a conference held at Hampton Court in January 1604. Following a petition from (supposedly) one thousand Puritan ministers asking for a conference on “a due and godly reformation” of the Church (and “not a disorderly innovation”) and “the redress of diverse abuses of the Church”, namely popish ceremonies,<sup>11</sup> and in contrast to the precedents from the past, when King settled religious questions by a solemn act, James initially gave a favourable response to the request for a conference – without the blessing of the bishops – and agreed to discuss with the “Reformers under pretended zeale” who “affect Noveltie and so confusion in all estates” (England. Sovereign. James, 1603b).

In his speeches to the meeting, James talked against innovation. According to William Barlow’s (Bishop of Lincoln, d. 1613) proceedings, James opened the conference saying that “he called not this assembly for any Innovation”. His purpose was “like a good physician, to examine and trie the complaints and fully to remove the occasions therof, if they prove scandalous, or to cure them, if they were dangerous, or, if but frivolous, yet to take knowledge of them” (Barlow, 1603: 5). On the second day, Barlow reports that James said that a King, from the very first entrance to the Crowne, has no mandate “to innovate the government presently established” (Barlow, 1603: 22). The result of the conference was a set of canons ordering the clergy to conform to the Book of Common Prayer and excommunicating those who refuse (England. Sovereign. James I, 1603a). The conference not having settled the issue (debates continued), a second Proclamation followed in July.<sup>12</sup> The Proclamation explains again the “so weakly grounded” case made during the Hampton Court conference, and gives “disobedient” ministers until the end of November to conform to the Canons of March.

A second moment concerning innovation in James’ reign that deserves mention is the Five Articles of Perth of 1618, an attempt by James to impose practices on the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in conformity with the Episcopal Church of England. Under pressures from the King, the articles were accepted at Perth in August 1618, and ratified by the Scottish Parliament in 1621. One of the arguments used at the Assembly to defend the Articles is *adiaphora*, an issue central to Jacobean religious policy. It is to support this argument that innovation entered into the conformists’ discourse at Perth (e.g. John Young, Dean of Winchester; James Sharp, Archbishop of St Andrews, David Lindsay, bishop of Brechin and member of the High Commission): indifferent things like ceremonies are minor affairs, and do not innovate on the Scriptures.<sup>13</sup> The Five Articles as an “innovation” remained a matter of controversy long after the conference at Perth. They are one of the grievances that continued to haunt James’ son – Charles – during his reign.

### 3. Innovating Prince

Charles reigned with every of his legislations on religion being accused of innovation. I distinguish three periods or moments in the history of the concept of innovation under Charles. Every moment involves polemics on innovation. The first moment concerns Charles’ promises in the very first years of his reign not to innovate, and the early accusations levied against him

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<sup>11</sup> Elton, 1960: 117-19.

<sup>12</sup> Kenyon, 1986: 119-21.

<sup>13</sup> Lindsay, 1621: 21-46, 56-57, 70.

(1625-1629). The second moment is the debate with the Scots on episcopacy versus Presbyterianism (1638-1643), which led to the Scottish rebellion, then the Civil War. The last moment is the negotiations for peace between Parliament and Charles, from June 1641 to November 1648.

### *First Moment: An Accusation*

Like his predecessors, in the first years of his reign Charles issued Declarations proclaiming that he does not “innovate” (Scotland. Sovereign. Charles I, July 1625) and admonishing his Subjects not to innovate (England. Sovereign. Charles, 1626). In spite of these declarations, Parliament made of “innovation” a word of accusation. One type of innovation Charles was accused of is political innovation. Between 1625 and 1628, Charles had to fight in order to levy a tax for war without Parliament’s approval. The third Parliament accused Charles of being an “innovator in the government”, and for this reason a capital enemy. In the end, in need of money for war, Charles consented in June 1628 to the Petition of Rights – a petition “to secure [the King’s Subjects] from future innovation” as John Glanville put it in a speech before Parliament – <sup>14</sup> that restricts the power of the Crown, including taxation. Yet the particular tax on Tonnage and Bondage was left to a further session, to the dissatisfaction of Charles. His Majesty dissolved the Parliament.

The second type of innovation is innovation in religion. Charles lived with public fears that his marriage with the Catholic Henrietta Maria and his obsession with order and deference would lead to a return to the Roman Church. <sup>15</sup> In June 1628, the House of Commons voted two Remonstrances intended to inform the King of how “your Officers and Ministers do behave themselves”, particularly the Duke of Buckingham (George Villiers, who would be assassinated in August) accused of “excessive power”, <sup>16</sup> “the chief and principal cause of evils”. <sup>17</sup> One concern of the remonstrance is “Innovation and change of government”. The second concern is fear of innovation in religion – “fear of innovation”, a key phrase of Charles’ opponents. “There is a general fear conceived in your people of some secret working and combination to introduce into this kingdom innovation and change of our holy Religion...His Majesty and Parliament have made laws to prevent the increase of Popery but with no good execution or effect...Legal proceedings...amount to no less than a toleration...Popish religion is openly professed and practiced”. The House was certainly right here. From the beginning of his reign to his latest writings, Charles always declared his intention to secure the “true religion” and his will to remove innovations. The problem was enforcement.

As an answer to the remonstrances, William Laud (1573-1645), then Bishop of Bath and Wells and member of the Privy Council, claimed in the name of Charles: “We are not bound to give an account of our actions but to God only”. Denying every accusation of the Remonstrances, Laud stated that it has always been “precious” to the King “not to admit innovations” in religion by Popery. If the two prelates accused in the remonstrance (Richard

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<sup>14</sup> Frankland, 1681: 293.

<sup>15</sup> On Charles’ use of reverence at Court and ritualism (rites and ceremonies) in the visible Church to mould his own image, see Davies, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> England, Parliament, 1654: 206-20.

<sup>17</sup> Frankland, 1681: 326.

Neile and Laud) should ever “attempt any innovation of religion...we should quickly take order with them” (Laud, 1628).

On the bishops’ and Laud’s advice Charles issued a Declaration prefixed to the Articles of Religion in November 1628. The Declaration stated that the 39 Articles of 1571 “do contain the true doctrine of England”, “from which we will not endure any varying or departing in the last degree”.<sup>18</sup> Parliament reacted with a Resolution against “divers courses and practices tending to the change and innovation of religion”<sup>19</sup> and a Protestation against “innovation of religion”, among others – the same protestation that accused Charles of being an innovator in the government. “Whosoever shall bring in innovation in religion, or by favour of countenance seek to extent or introduce Popery or Arminianism, or any other opinion disagreeing from the true and orthodox Church, shall be reputed a capital enemy to this kingdom and commonwealth”.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, a week later (10 March) Charles dissolved Parliament, as he did the first two – a well-known period in England’s history – and, in order to silence his opponents, issued a declaration explaining why he dissolved the institution. His Majesty claimed his intention to “tie and restrain all Opinions that nothing might be left for private Fancies and Innovations....Neither shall we ever give Way to the Authorising of any Thing, whereby any Innovation may steal or creep into the Church; but to preserve that Unity of Doctrine and Discipline established” (Charles, 1687: 223-30). Innovations that “creep into” use is a motto that many repeated in the following years, in Parliament and in sermons.

### *Second Moment: Innovation Wars*

Charles ruled without Parliament for eleven years (1629-40). It is during this period that Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury since 1633, initiated a series of reforms to impose uniformity on the Church, using the High Commission and the Star Chamber to punish the obstinate. It is also during the period of personal rule by Charles that a royal prerogative imposed a new Prayer Book on Scotland (December 1636), for “uniformity” of worship in the Kingdom, fashioned mainly on the basis of the English liturgy, “the only forme which We...think fit to be used in God’s public worship”.<sup>21</sup> “By the form that is kept in the outward worship of God”, claims the Preface to the Book, “men commonly judge of Religion. If in that there be a diversitie, straight they are apt to conceive the Religion to bee diverse”. As Edward and James had, the Book contrasts tradition and innovation and justifies new ceremonies in term of *adiaphora*.

In the following months, the (Presbyterian) Scots set up four committees that drew up a National Covenant that rejected Charles’ innovations.<sup>22</sup> A series of Declarations on religious innovation from both sides followed, the Scots accusing Charles of innovating (Henderson, 1638; Church of Scotland. General Assembly, 1639a; Church of Scotland, 1639b) and Charles denying it (England. Sovereign. Charles, 1638; Scotland. Sovereign. Charles I, 1638a; Scotland. Sovereign. Charles, 1638b; England. Sovereign, Charles, 1639). To support their case, the Scot

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<sup>18</sup> Bray, 2004: 482.

<sup>19</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 77-82.

<sup>20</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 82-83.

<sup>21</sup> [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Scotland/BCP\\_1637.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Scotland/BCP_1637.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 124-34.

covenanters made a semantic clarification: “His Majesties doeth ascribe all the late distractions of this Kirk and Commons-wealth, to our conceived feares of the innovation of religion and law, as the cause and occasion thereof, and not to these innovations themselves...as if the cause were rather in apprehension and fancie, then in realitie and substance”. All in all, “Our feares...must still remaine” (Henderson, 1638).

The issue of this controversy is well known to historians. Charles dissolved the General Assembly of the Scottish Church to which he had agreed. In defiance of the King’s High Commissioner, the Scottish Assembly continued to sit and declared null all acts and pronouncements of General Assemblies held between 1606 and 1618, including the Articles of Perth since they had been dominated by the King and the bishops. The Prayer Book and the Book of Canons were condemned as unlawful. The Assembly also abolished Episcopacy from the Scottish Church. Scottish bishops were to be excommunicated.<sup>23</sup>

The next step was a set of canons issued by Laud – a “manifesto against innovation” as John Foster put it in his biography of parliamentarian John Elliot,<sup>24</sup> – but was made illegal by Parliament a few months later. “Our good Subjects imagine that We Our Self are perverted, and do worship God in a superstitious way, and that we intend to bring in some alteration of the Religion here established...We are against all and every intention of any Popish innovation”. The canons reiterated that anyone who opposed Charles opposed God and addressed the charge of innovation in religion explicitly, enjoining bishops, priests and doctors to take an oath “for the preventing of all Innovations in Doctrine and Government” (Church of England, 1640). His Majesty required that the bishops “adhere constantly to the Doctrine and Discipline here established, and never give way (for so much as can any way concern them) to any Innovation or Alteration thereof”.<sup>25</sup> The canons enjoin Church and law officials to “enquire into the keeping of the same in their Visitations, and punish such as they shall finde to be delinquent”. A book of Visitory articles deposited in the records of the Archbishop of Canterbury was to be used to this end against both papists and sectaries. Again, the canons use the *adiaphora* argument to justify certain rites and ceremonies. The communion table “is on its own nature indifferent, neither commanded nor condemned by the word of God, either expressly or by immediate deduction”. This is, claim the canons, the practice of the Primitive Church and the order of late Elizabeth.

Ultimately the result of the Laudian “innovations” imposed on the Scots was a riot, and eventually the so-called Bishops’ Wars (1639-1640), which played a key role in the events leading to the English Civil War and Revolution.

### *Third Moment: Innovation Negotiated*

Parliament reconvened in November 1640, putting an end to personal rule by Charles. In December, Londoners sent a petition, known as the Roots and Branches petition, to Parliament opposing the episcopate or government of bishops and archbishops, who “have proved very prejudicial and dangerous both to the Church and Commonwealth”, and asking for its abolition.

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<sup>23</sup> Church of Scotland, 2009: 43-49.

<sup>24</sup> Foster, 1864: 58, 393.

<sup>25</sup> Kennet, 1706: 101-102.

<sup>26</sup> The petition was followed by hundreds of other petitions in the following year, many of them concerned with “scandalous and dangerous innovations”. This campaign was orchestrated by the House of Commons. The King orchestrated a similar campaign of counter-petitions. The signatories made some conventional or literary concessions, but not on the government of the Church. “Wee, as others, are sensible of the common grievances of the Kingdome. Yet, when wee consider, that Bishops were instituted in the time of the Apostles...wee cannot but expresse our just feares that their desire is to introduce an absolute Innovation of Presbyterian Government” (Aston, 1642: 1-2, 9).

In February 1641 Parliament accused Laud – the “Arch-Innovator”, as the Puritan William Prynne named him – of corruption, subversion and treason (England. Parliament, House of Commons, 1640). The Scottish Parliament played a central role in the accusations against Laud (Scotland. Parliament, 1641). Laud was imprisoned in the Tower of London – then brought to trial in 1644 and beheaded in January 1645. Parliament also resolved that many censures and sentences of the High Commission were illegal and void, such as those imposed on John Bastwick, Henry Burton and William Prynne. Parliament also abolished the Star Chamber and the High Commission.

Accusations of innovation multiplied in the following months. In May, the House of Commons voted a protestation against “divers Innovations and Superstitions brought into the Church” from the “Adherents to the see of Rome” whose aims are to “subvert the fundamentall Laws of England and Ireland, and to introduce the exercise of an Arbitrary and Tyrannical Government”. The protestation includes an oath to “maintain and defend...the true reformed religion...against all popery and popish innovation” (England. Parliament, 1641a). <sup>27</sup> In July, the House of Lords discussed a bill on reforming the Church. <sup>28</sup> The bill was informed by a committee on innovations chaired by the bishop of Lincoln. The proceedings list 42 “innovations” in doctrine and discipline in recent years, some whose author is named, like Mr. Brown, and suggest a list of unresolved issues regarding the Book of Common Prayer (Church of England, 1641). In September, the House adopted a resolution against “innovations in or about the worship of God” and voted that: 1. The communion table should stand east and west; 2) Games and pastimes should be prohibited on the Lord’s day; 3) Pictures and images in churches should be removed (England. Parliament. House of Commons, 1641).

In the meantime, Parliament sent ten propositions to Charles (June 1641), <sup>29</sup> then a Grand Remonstrance (December 1641), then nineteen propositions (June 1642) to resolve the conflict with His Majesty, with no effect. <sup>30</sup> Two civil wars followed (1642-46, 1648-49), during which a series of negotiations for peace between Parliament and Charles took place, with propositions from Parliament in February 1643 at Oxford, November 1644 at Uxbridge, and July 1646 at Newcastle. The latest negotiations occurred from September to November 1648 at Newport.

Every proposition from the House of Commons includes demands for a Bill for the “suppression of Popish superstitions and innovations”, to which Charles finally agreed in May

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<sup>26</sup> Cressy and Ferrell, 1966: 174-79.

<sup>27</sup> Kenyon, 1986: 200-201.

<sup>28</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 167-79.

<sup>29</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 163-66.

<sup>30</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 249-54.

1647: His Majesty “hath been always ready to prevent the practices of Papists, and therefore is content to passe an Act of Parliament...for the supressing of Innovations”.<sup>31</sup> Charles also reluctantly consented to a Presbyterian government for three years. Yet on December 26, Charles concluded a secret deal with the Scots. He consented to the Solemn League and Covenant, “an innovating oath and covenant”, as he called it (Charles, 1648: 111),<sup>32</sup> and to a Presbyterian government of the Church, but excluded “Anti-Trinitarians, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Arminians, Familists, Brownists, Separatists, Independents, Libertines, and Seekers” from the liberty in religion bestowed on the Presbyterians.<sup>33</sup> Given that Parliament was split between Presbyterians and Independents, the second civil war followed. In January 1649, a High Court of Justice, whose jurisdiction Charles contested, was instituted against Charles’ “design to subvert the ancient and fundamental laws and liberties of this nation” and to declare war without Parliament’s consent.<sup>34</sup> Charles was beheaded on 30 January 1649.

#### 4. Discussion

It is during the period studied in this article that the word innovation entered the everyday vocabulary. Over the period 1548-1649, the occurrence and use of the word is pervasive in the language. The concept serves every cause, religious and political, royal and subversive, and is used by conformists and dissidents, Anglicans and Presbyterians, Protestants (Puritans) and Catholics. To be sure, there exists a story of the concept before the Reformation (Godin, 2015). But the concept gets into the mouths of Princes and parliamentarians with increasing frequency during the Reformation, broadly defined. It also gets into the discourses of archbishops, bishops and other members of the clergy, into every citizen’s discourse in fact.

#### *Meaning*

At the time of the Reformation, there was no theory of innovation – there is none, in fact, before the late nineteenth century. Equally, no user of the word defines the concept – one exception is Stephen Gardiner in 1547 (1483-1755).<sup>35</sup> The idea of innovation is inarticulate. The only way to understand what people mean by innovation is to study the use they make of the concept. One thing is sure. There is no connotation of the future nor of technology, as we would understand innovation today. To Kings, Parliaments and the Church, innovation is changes to laws and customs. To Puritans, it is change with regard to Scripture, namely men’s inventions (superstitions). To some other, like the Catholics, innovation is the Protestant Reformation itself. Innovation is a term imposed by the critics and never a self-description. It serves to fix something under a single label.

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<sup>31</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 311-16.

<sup>32</sup> In September 1643, the two Parliaments of England and Scotland had signed a Solemn League and Covenant — for “the preservation of the reformed religion...according to the Word of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches”. The signatories promise to “endeavour the extirpation of Popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine”. See Gardiner, 1906: 267-71.

<sup>33</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 347-52.

<sup>34</sup> Gardiner, 1906: 357-58.

<sup>35</sup> Foxe, 1583: 1348.

Innovation is eminently subjective. Everyone has his own understanding of what innovation is. What is innovation to one person is not to another. To some, the Prayer Book is an innovation (the Scots); to others (e.g.: English Divines) it is not – although it may need to be “purged of all innovations and absurdities” (Anonymous, 1643). To some, a “true protestant religion” is that “opposite unto Popery and Popish innovations” (England. Parliament, 1641a). To others, the so-called popish superstitions are not innovations but rather things indifferent. Each side of a controversy uses the concept of innovation, and portrays itself as the true judge.

At the time of the English Reformation – until the nineteenth century in fact – innovation (as an accusation) was talked of in terms of a series of core or constitutive concepts. One is *change*. The Reformation was a period of considerable change. Changing Christianity to Protestantism has been a long process enmeshed in political struggles. This was a time when change, particularly change to religion, law and politics, was prohibited. The vocabulary used to make sense of (acceptable) change was a series of terms beginning with “re”: reformation, renovation, restoration, renewing. All of these terms mean the purification of what has been “corrupted”, “deformed” and “abused”. It is a matter of improving what exists, not of changing it. In this context, innovation is the emblematic and contested concept of change. Innovation is changing to the worst: *altering* – a recurrent co-word with innovating –, “polluting”, “poisoning”, “perverting”, “prostituting” and “adulterating” things; changing what is exemplary – customs, laws and government and, particularly in religious matters, Antiquity (Primitive Church and Scripture) – by “adding” to or “subtracting” from it, or wholly substituting something else, “breaking” or “overthrowing” it.

What about *novelty*, as the etymology of the word innovation suggests (*novus*). Novelty (something new) itself is a key word of the time, but it is not the issue. Novelty is mere “imagination”, in a pejorative sense: “fancy”, “fantasy”. Novelty is also “men’s invention”, “device” and “forgery”. Again, the etymology must be taken seriously (*in+*). Innovation is more than mere novelty. Innovation is an *activity*: “introducing” something new into the world, new ideas (doctrine) or activities (worship) into practice. In this sense, innovation is deliberate change. One concept that serves this discourse is *liberty*, not in the modern sense (autonomy) but in the sense of excessive and arbitrary liberty (as being opposed to the social order), namely licentiousness. “Private opinion” and “private men” were key terms used at the time to discuss such a liberty. A related concept is *scheme*, together with “design”, and later, “project”. The innovator has a purpose, a scheme or design: “overthrowing” the social order; reintroducing “popery” in Protestantism. He is never alone. He creates a whole “sect” that follows him.

What distinguishes innovation from *heresy* (meaning = choice), a key word of the time, is the scope of the liberty or deviance. To be sure, the same vocabulary used against heresy is used to discuss innovation.<sup>36</sup> Innovation too is called heretical (“heretical innovation”). But with the decline of persecution, and of the Inquisition in the Christian world (for political rather than humanist purposes such as individual freedom), innovation came to include more than religious heresy. Innovation is religious *and* political deviance. This distinguishes the use and function of the concept of innovation from heresy in Protestant England. Heresy, as strictly religious, is a word of Papal power. By the time of Charles’ reign, the word heresy was used mainly as a polemical. Kings as Sovereign of the Church and controversialists used the concept to refute

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<sup>36</sup> For some official texts on heresy, see Peters, 1980; Hughes and Larkin, 1964: 57-60; 181-86.

their opponent (the Catholic) using his own words: using a Popish word against the Papists themselves.

Innovation may be an activity and it is discussed as such, with emphasis on the “innovator”, but what is feared are the effects of innovation. Innovation is “sudden” and “violent” and, particularly after the French Revolution, is often discussed in terms of “revolt” and what we call *revolution* today (wars, disorders, schisms), and contrasted to reformation, which is gradual. Innovation is destructive of the social order. This is why innovation is to be feared. The innovator foments a plan to “subvert” things for his own purposes. Innovation may be private as to origin, but it is public with regard to its consequences. Innovation may begin as a small or indifferent thing (*adiaphora*) but over time it leads to a chain reaction. It creeps imperceptibly, “little by little”, into the whole world.

### *Use*

During the English Reformation, the concept of innovation serves two main functions. First, it serves as an injunction not to innovate. Even a King should not innovate – such is the advice of counsellors, like Francis Bacon’s (Bacon, 1661; 1733), and messages of archbishops, bishops and sermons before Parliament. Injunctions start early during the Reformation and are proclaimed at the very beginning of each reign. Yet in the face of obstinate people, such an injunction needs to be repeated again and again. An injunction not to innovate is never uncontested. Both conformists and non-conformists regularly recall others of Princes’ injunctions.

The second function that the concept of innovation serves is against the non-conformist. Innovation is an instrument of accusation in the linguistic arsenal of the reformer. Princes, Parliaments and the Church hierarchy accuse every enemy of innovating. At the same time, such an accusation is always contested. Denial is a leitmotif of the discourses. Here lies the paradox of innovation. Everyone innovates but denies he innovates. A monarch repeatedly denies that he innovates in matters political and religious. The language of innovation during the English Reformation is a spiral of injunction, accusation and denial that, in the end, gave a polemical overtone to the concept. No-one agrees on what innovation is in the particular, but everyone fears innovation and observes innovation in the behavior of others.

## **5. Conclusion**

Innovation is a concept of Greek origin (*kainotomia*). The concept originally had an essentially political and contested connotation. It entered the Latin vocabulary around the third and fourth centuries as “renewing” (*innovo*), with prominent uses that were positive: spiritual (return to pure or original soul – before sin) and legal (reenacting an old Act). As a third step, at the time of the Reformation, the concept entered the everyday vocabulary, with widespread use in the seventeenth century, mainly pejorative. To be sure, the vocabulary of innovation shared place with other concepts used as synonyms, like “change” and “alteration”. But innovation was the most loaded and polemical concept of the three.

This article concentrated on monarchs' language and its reception in England. To be sure, the monarchs' use of the concept of innovation is only one source of the language of innovation in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. There were other uses: discourses from divines, sermons from clergymen, tracts from controversialists and pamphleteers. The study of these discourses is matter for a future article.

Edward VI was the first monarch to use the concept for religious policy in 1548, as an injunction. Fifty-five years later, James I resuscitated the concept, again as an injunction. Then the concept became accusative (and polemical) during Charles I's reign. How do we make sense of this story? Edward's Proclamation of 1548 on innovation did not have the success anticipated. Mary revoked every Protestant legislation, and Elizabeth's settlement continued to be challenged by Puritans and Catholics. Faced with similar threats, James and Charles appropriated Edward's concept in order to enforce and secure the Reformation.

Innovation possesses two characteristics that make it an essential part of the language of the Reformation. First, innovation had been a loaded concept for centuries. As a rule, during the Reformation, innovation is roasted on one hand ("fancy"; "mens invention"), and dramatized on the other ("subversive"). Such a moral concept serves to enforce and secure the Reformation (Edward) and to settle what the Elizabethan settlement did not settle, hence the use of the concept during James' and Charles' reigns. Second, innovation is an inclusive term. It covers religious heresy and political deviance. Over time, with the decline of persecutions and of the Inquisition in the Christian world (for political rather than for humanist purposes or in the name of individual freedom), innovation became a secular concept used to discuss what was previously called heresy. Innovation is heterodoxy or deviance, both political and religious.

One question remains to be addressed. Is innovation a Protestant term? Put differently, why did the concept diffuse so widely in England at the time of the Reformation? Statistically speaking, over the last five centuries the concept was used first of all in religious matters. To the best of my knowledge, in this context no European country seems to have used the concept as much as England did (and neither did the US). The concept diffused in this country in the first half of the seventeenth century. The Protestants in England appropriated a concept with moral connotations to support their case against Rome. But the Reformation as a new orthodoxy is also a "heresy" according to Catholics. Protestants needed a new and different term – innovation – to attack those who, in turn, contest this new orthodoxy – or unorthodoxy – to denote differences from the Papal vocabulary of heresy. In doing so, Anglicans and Puritans were saying that they, as Protestants, were not heretics. Others innovate, not them. Yet, over time the concept was used by the Catholics against the Protestants.

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